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'Overwhelming' Evidence

CIA Veteran: Flight 007 Was Spy Plane

Special to The Tribune

OGDEN — Korean Airflight 007 was a spy plane that purposely flew into Soviet airspace to simulate an invasion, said a 25-year CIA veteran Thursday.

Ralph W. McGehee, a retired member of the CIA who served in numerous overseas intelligence operations, told students at Weber State College that the United States worked with the Korean government to orchestrate espionage by use of a commercial airliner.

Mr. McGehee said, "The evidence is overwhelming that this was a planned event by the United States to send a commercial airliner equipped with spy equipment into the Soviet Union thinking they would not shoot it down."

He said that he believes that Soviet pilots did, in fact, mistake the Boeing 747 commercial jet for the sophisticated spy plane, the RC 135, that was circling nearby.

He said, "I don't think the Soviets knew it was a commercial airliner."

McGehee told the Weber State group that the United States has used commercial airliners in the past for intelligence operations and that during the last two decades has ordered United States military pilots to penetrate Soviet airspace in order to test their defense radar.

He said that, unlike the United States, the Soviets do not keep their radar defense operating on a continuous basis. This procedure makes it impossible for U.S. intelligence to understand their radar and build defenses in their aircraft and weapons. The United States then has to "simulate" attacks so the Soviets will turn on the radar.

"Only when the radar is activated can we monitor their system," McGehee said.

He noted that the RC-135 contains electronic equipment that is designed to monitor the Russian radar once it is operating.

He said that the day of the KAL Flight there was a planned ICBM test launch by the Soviets. A commercial airliner "wandered" directly over that area as well as over several major Soviet military installations. He added that in addition to the RC-135 that was in the area, an American relay satellite passed directly over the commercial airliner both as it flew above the ICBM test site and again as it passed over the military installations.

McGehee said, "In 1978 the United States did a similar thing and the Soviets forced the plane to

land. With flight 007 the United States had no intention for the plane to be shot down and thought they were getting the best of both worlds. The United States would get the information and Russia would get a black eye."

He refuted the idea that the KAL flight with 269 people on board could have unknowingly been off course. He said that the RC-135 would have known by its radar equipment that the flight had left its flight plan and could have contacted the plane. Korean and Japanese radar equipment also monitors the area and would have known if it was in Soviet airspace.

"You cannot, in that area, stray without everybody telling you," he said.

He continued, "The Korean airflight veered off course directly over the area where the equipment in the RC-135 was aimed. They were able to tell that KAL 007 had veered off. Why did they not tell them where they were?"

McGehee, who said he is followed by the CIA and has wire taps on his phone, said the CIA is not being totally honest with the information it has released on the incident and cites a long history of what he calls "repressed information."

The former agent joined the CIA in 1952 and spent 14 years in overseas assignments.